

Supporting Children of Incarcerated Parents

Senior Corps Examples

Introduction

In his State of the Union Address, the President reminded the nation of the more than 1.5 million American children with a parent or parents in prison. He described children of prisoners as “boys and girls trying to grow up without guidance and attention, and children who have to go through a prison gate to be hugged by their mom or dad.” And he asked the nation to reach out and provide help and assistance to these vulnerable children and their families. According to national statistics, 58% of children of prisoners are under the age of 10, with 22% under the age of 5. Most live with single and/or elderly women.

The Corporation for National and Community Service is committed to joining forces with other federal agencies and community organizations to provide services and assistance to the children of prisoners. Indeed, we are confident that many Senior Corps volunteers already help and assist in both direct and indirect ways.

Senior Corps has encouraged all of its grantees to develop volunteer service opportunities that support and help sustain the children of whose parents are incarcerated. Senior Corps also asked the project director to share their accomplishment/best practices. Following is some of the information they shared:

California: Eight volunteers from the **San Diego County Foster Grandparent Program**, sponsored by Catholic Charities of San Diego, will provide mentoring, tutoring, and nurturing support for 200 youth who are juvenile offenders or in foster care, with emphasis on youth who have parents in prison and/or an intergenerational history with the criminal justice system. *Contact: Sharin Gavette (619) 231-2828 or sgavette@ccdsd.org*

RSVP of Santa Cruz County and **RSVP of the Greater San Jose Area**, each sponsored by local Volunteer Centers, have assigned volunteers to participate in the “Friends Outside Program,” which provides practical and emotional assistance to successfully reintegrate prison inmates released from county jails with family and community life. A popular activity is hosting a “Kids Day” party for the young children of inmates in the local jails. Volunteers also “adopt” individual families and provide ongoing friendship and support. *Contacts: Lois Connell (831) 427-5070 or rsvpvol@scvolunteercenter.org; Jill Shanmugasurdaram (408) 247-1126 x318 or rsvp@vcsv.org*

Florida: Central Florida Foster Grandparent Program in Orlando, sponsored by Florida Senior Programs, Inc., is working with fifteen volunteers who will serve children of inmates enrolled in the Head Start Program. Another 28 FGP volunteers will serve children in foster care, providing respite to Foster Care families with the expectation that by having alternative caregivers the children will be moved less frequently from family to family as stresses on the foster family are reduced. This program will use the Search Institute's "40 Developmental Assets" model. *Contact: Ann E. Smith (407) 298-4180 or Bgrazulis@attglobal.net*

Idaho: The Foster Grandparent Program of South East Idaho, Inc. in Blackfoot, has assigned volunteers to work with new partnerships developed by the project to mentor children in grades 1-4 who have one or more close family member incarcerated. *Contact: Carla H. Kelley (208) 785-8452 or Carla@fgpsei.com*

Southeast Idaho Community Action Agency in Pocatello, (RSVP and VISTA project sponsor) recently received confirmation of a \$100,000 annual (three year renewable) grant from the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services to establish a mentoring program serving children whose parent(s) are incarcerated. RSVP and VISTA have been instrumental in developing a mentoring program serving at-risk youth. In the course of this development, they have discovered an alarmingly high number of students in the Pocatello School District whose parents are in prison. This discovery has led to development to assign mentors with such students and prompted SEICAA to seek this grant funding from Health and Human Services. Sister Janice Otis will play a lead role in this project as will VISTA members assigned to recruitment and training of RSVP volunteers that will be assigned as mentors. Pocatello is the site of the major Idaho Correctional facility for women.

Last year 260 Pocatello students were mentored by 220 RSVP volunteers. The students are in the Juvenile Detention Center of Pocatello as well as public and private schools across southeastern Idaho. *Contact: Sister Janice Otis (208) 233-7364 or email: sjotis@seicaa.org*

Indiana: FGP of Allen County in Fort Wayne. Children come to the Daybreak Children's Shelter because they are abused or neglected. Often their fathers have been incarcerated, leaving their families with little income and under high stress. The mothers of these families are also often involved with the justice system. Two Foster Grandparents spent 1,320 hours mentoring and caring for youngsters at Daybreak. Generally, one Grandparent served five children, but at a temporary shelter the population can change every day. Over a year, large numbers of children were served.

The Foster Grandparents' helped these children feel comfortable and safe again. They rocked the babies; gently played with the toddlers, read books to children of any age. They provided a comforting, stable influence to children who have come from chaos and violence. Daybreak staff, when surveyed, reported that the Foster Grandparents helped children as follows: social skills improved 88 percent, self-help skills improved 100 percent, and emotional well-being improved 100 percent. *Contact: Jeanette DeVore*
Phone: (260) 426-7829 or Email: fgp@infionline.net

Louisiana: The Calcasieu Parish Foster Grandparent Program in Lake Charles, sponsored by Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwest Louisiana partnered with the "Impact Lake Charles" AmeriCorps Program and Big Brothers Big Sisters' Faith-Based Program and assigned 15 Foster Grandparents to provide mentoring of children who have one or more of their parents incarcerated. Mentoring will take place in Head Start Centers in Calcasieu and Jeff Davis Parish's after school programs and elementary schools. *Contact: Betty Gimnich (337) 476-5437 or bgimnich@cppj.net*

Massachusetts: The **Norfolk County RSVP** in Dedham, sponsored by Norfolk County Commissioners, has collaborated with the Norfolk County Sheriff's Office & Correctional Center to establish a *Mentoring Program for Inmates*. Volunteers co-facilitate discussion groups in areas such as employment, family and child support, education, budgeting/monetary concerns, housing, conflict resolution, and life skills. In addition, RSVP helped to recruit community volunteers who in turn organize and coordinate meaningful and enriching activities with at-risk youth, including children of inmates, at summer and school year academies. *Contact: Tammy E. Colbert (781) 329-5728 or rsvp@norfolkcounty.org*

Michigan: **AAA, Inc. Foster Grandparent Program in St. Joseph**, reports evaluation results from its first year of a grant emphasizing services to Children of Incarcerated Parents and Children in Foster Care. Surveys of teacher in the Children in Foster Care project indicated that 92 percent of children demonstrated improvements in attendance; 95 percent demonstrated increase in ability to focus; and 85 percent demonstrated improvements in behavior as a result of interaction with the Foster Grandparent. While only 40 percent of the children showed progress toward adequate grade level achievement, 51 percent were improving. Several teachers noted in comments that these are long-term goals and the program has had only a relatively short time with the children. All of the teachers credited Foster Grandparents with assisting in achieving the positive outcomes so far this first year. It was the first time many teachers were aware of the personal circumstances of these children; in some cases the counselors and principals were also unaware. In the Children of Incarcerated Parents component,

teachers reported improvements in almost all the children in areas of attendance, ability to focus and improvements in behavior. Improvements in grade level achievement were, however, much lower. Fifteen of the 20 Foster Grandparents remained in close touch with their assigned children during this summer. Contact: *Camellia Pisegna*
Phone: (269) 983-7058 or Email:
camelliapisegna@areaagencyonaging.org

Missouri: **SERVE RSVP in Fulton** provided support for Calloway County children with a parent who is incarcerated in the county jail or who is either serving weekend sentences or is on work release. They also served children who are in the Department of Family Services custody. Last year 10 RSVP volunteers were assigned to the Callaway Action Network, which provides emergency funding and food for needy families, to Little Brother/Little Sister, and to HAVEN House. The volunteers provided mentoring and support activities for 75 at-risk children. They prepared back-to-school supplies, provided free books and Books-on-Loan for the children and their families and held a Community Holiday Adoption for all the children and family members. They provided food from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Commodities program and the local Food Pantry, and monthly free clothing shopping at the Thrift Shop. Contact: *Pam Phelps (573) 624-9452 or email: rsvp@coin.org*

New Hampshire: The Southern NH Services Inc. RSVP in Manchester is expanding and strengthening a recidivism reduction program known as "Thresholds and Decisions" for inmates incarcerated in a maximum-security jail. The 80 past alumni of the program have shown a recidivism rate of 14% compared to a rate of 40-50% among the general prison population. Using the Thresholds materials, 30 RSVP volunteers will be trained to teach decision making, problem solving, and life planning skills to inmates. Contact: *Sue Conner (603) 668-8010 x6022 or email: francesca@snhs.org*

The Crotched Mountain FGP in Manchester has Thirty-three Foster Grandparents providing consistent one-to-one preschool readiness activities with 234 children in child care centers in Hillsborough and Sullivan Counties. The group included one child of an inmate and four foster children. According to the professional assessments by the staff, 76 percent of the children reached their developmental and pre-literacy goals, preparing them for kindergarten. Thirty-two Foster Grandparents provided 217 school children from five to nine years of age with assistance in reading and math skills. All the children advanced to the next grade. Contact: *Sherry Wheeler Phone: (603) 668-1990 or Email: sherry@cmf.org*

New Mexico: The Valencia County Foster Grandparent Program in Los Lunas, sponsored by SER De New Mexico, is located near a large state penitentiary for male offenders. The prison is a key component of the economy, and a large contingent of the population is the families of prisoners – spouses and children who move to Los Lunas to be near the prison and their incarcerated family member. The FGP project has assigned Foster Grandparents to provide ongoing support and services to children in the community, including the children of inmates, through schools, the Head Start Center, day care facilities, and family services and community agencies. On an annual basis, as many of 3,000 children of inmates, primarily under the age of 10, receive nurturing, mentoring, love and support from Foster Grandparents. *Contact: Nick Carrasco (505) 866-1789 or fgpnick@newmexico.com*

Rio Grande Valley RSVP in Las Cruces provided mentoring support to children of prisoners at the Southern New Mexico Correction facility, a maximum-security prison. Ten RSVP volunteers served as volunteer mentors for the children during weekend visits by families to their incarcerated spouses or other family members. The children range in age from 2 to 17. RSVP volunteers tailor their mentoring sessions according to the needs of the children, their ages, and how many children are in attendance. Group sessions deal with issues of anger, health problems, lack of parental support, and relationships with peers as well as the wider community. Last year the RSVP volunteers mentored 270 children of prisoners, providing a starting point for a healing process in their lives. Reports suggest at least some of the children are altering their school and home behavior in positive directions, and this is in part the result of the intervention of the RSVP volunteers. *Contact: Aurora M. Ybarra Phone: (505) 528-3035 or Email: Auroray@las-cruces.org*

New York: The **Wayne County Foster Grandparent Program** in Lyons has a volunteer serving in the “New Beginnings Program” sponsored by Wayne County Action Program, Inc. The individual works with children who attend parenting classes with their parents, including parents who are “out-mates” from the county jail. The volunteer also attends and helps with parenting classes in jail for separate groups of men and women. *Contact: Annette Hawver (315) 946-7530 x1502 or annette@waynecap.org*

Oklahoma: **RSVP of Muskogee** sponsored by Volunteers of America of Oklahoma has twenty-six RSVP volunteers serving in the Books R Cool program at the Eddie Warner Correctional Facility. The program provides a positive link between the inmate parent and his or her children. Inmates are given children’s books, which they read aloud into a tape recorder. The resulting tape and book are then mailed to the child of the inmate. RSVP volunteers donated some of the books and others were obtained through a grant. The volunteers sorted the books into groups by age level and

attached “This Book Belongs To” labels so the inmate parent could write in the child’s name. Over 300 inmates and their children have received a book and tape. *Contact: Etter Nottingham*
Phone: (918) 683-1578 Ext=x12 or Email: enottingham@voaok.org

North Carolina: Torchlight Academy is a public charter school located in Raleigh that serves 150 kindergarten - 6th grade children. The majority of the children attending the school are from troubled homes where drugs, poverty or incarcerated parents prevail. There are 5 Foster Grandparents from the Raleigh FGP who serve as mentors to 8 children in 4 classrooms. One of the 3rd grade students we will call Bryan has benefited by Foster Grandparent Jessie Peacock for two years. Bryan is a crack baby whose parents have been in and out of prison for causes relating to their crack addictions. Bryan constantly moves from place to place staying with his parent’s friends or relatives while his parents are incarcerated. Torchlight Academy has been a stable force in Bryan’s life allowing him to attend no matter where he is living. Bryan was thought to never be able to walk and feed himself. When Bryan came to Torchlight, he was withdrawn, lifeless, and never expressed any emotions or communicated with others. Foster Grandparent Jessie Peacock has worked with him and now he feels more self confident, acts like a normal child and can carry out conversations. Bryan has repeated the third grade twice. He just recently began sounding out words, reading sight words and has started to read sentences. Bryan is just one of many children whose parents are incarcerated that have the privilege of being nurtured by a Foster Grandparent.

Pennsylvania: The Montgomery County Foster Grandparent Program in Eagleville, sponsored by Family Service of Montgomery County, will assign ten volunteers to three sites, where they will provide education assistance, guidance, and nurturing on a daily basis to 50 children in an area known to have a high percentage of children with incarcerated parents. *Contact: Mary Lloyd (610) 630-0201 or MLloyd13@aol.com*

Rhode Island: The East Bay RSVP in East Providence, sponsored by East Bay Community Action Self Help, has assigned 30 volunteers to mentor K-6 children of incarcerated parents to improve their chances of being accepted to competitive high schools and avoid negative behaviors and crime. In addition, 20 volunteers will assist the Rhode Island Court-Appointed Special Advocates Program (CASA) in building its organizational capacity to better serve their children, with the result that more children will be in stable environments and fewer children will be in night-to-night placements. *Contact: Audrey Field (401) 435-7876 or ebayrsvp@aol.com*

Providence FGP sponsored by the Federal Hill House in Providence has ninety-one Foster Grandparents who will provide services to 882 children. These children originally come from homes where there was parental incompetence; where parents had been incarcerated; or where the family was homeless, had been headed by a single parent, or had been headed by teen parents. Many of these children have a hard time adjusting to child care and schools. The children don't feel safe and secure within their new settings, but after they bond with Grandparents they adapt to their new environment, and begin to build their new lives. *Contact: Carole Blanck Phone: (401) 421-1095 or Email: provfgp@aol.com*

South Dakota: The **Central South Dakota RSVP** in Pierre, sponsored by St. Mary's Foundation, will expand the project's mentoring and public safety services. Nineteen volunteers mentored children whose mothers are incarcerated at a women's prison, interacting once a month for 3 hours with up to 24 children. Where possible, the project will work to link the children with RSVP and FGP volunteers in their often distant home communities. At other times the volunteers will be available to provide follow-up to the mothers and provide additional mentoring to children at the Pierre Indian Learning School. *Contact: Kathleen Nagle (605) 224-3337 orkatienagle@chi-midwest.org.*

Siouxland RSVP in Sioux Falls, sponsored by Evangelical Lutheran Good Samaritans is working with the Family Connections Center. The mission of Family Connections is keeping "families together while they are apart." RSVP volunteers serve with the Center's "Children's Connection" network, which has as the goal of interrupting the cycle of crime that develops more readily in the families of prison inmates. In the short term, the program helps the children to make better choices and to learn about and seek positive opportunities, such as academic success. *Contact: Sandra K. Hansen (605) 367-7274 or email: lcrsvp@juno.com*

Tennessee: The **Memphis Foster Grandparent Program** sponsored by the Porter Leath Children Center has twelve Foster Grandparents assigned to 36 children of inmates at three Memphis elementary schools. These schools are in areas of extreme poverty and beset with high crime rates. More than 200 children with parents who are incarcerated are enrolled in these three schools. The Foster Grandparents serve as mentors, providing a caring adult in the lives of the children. They encourage their mentees to stay in school and teach them coping and life skills needed for success in school and everyday life. Seventeen of the 36 children showed documented improvements in their behavior in the first three months after they were assigned a Foster Grandparent mentor. *Contact: Viola Frey (901) 577-2500 or vfrey@porter-leath.org*

Texas: The Foster Grandparent Program of the Concho Valley located in San Angelo, sponsored by the Valley Council of Governments, will provide mentoring and tutoring for 40 children in foster care and children with incarcerated parents. The project is collaborated with the faith-based Prison Fellowship and the local Boys and Girls Clubs to identify the children to be served. *Contact: Cheri S. Roberts (915) 223-5704 x228 or fostergrandparent@cvcog.org*

Utah: The Five County RSVP in St. George, sponsored by the Five County Association of Governments, has assigned volunteers to help prepare offenders to return to the community. Their volunteer duties include creating discharge planning models, tutoring, including GED and vocational, and providing support to the children and families of the inmates. *Contact: Linda Sappington (435) 674-5757 or vcofwc@infowest.com*

Vermont: The Windsor County RSVP in Springfield, sponsored by HealthCare & Rehabilitation Services of Southeastern Vermont, is expanding services to low-income families and their children by training volunteers in support reading from Windsor County Reads, Even Start and Head Start and read books with and model reading behaviors to low income families. 12 of these volunteers will use the CNCS Citizenship Toolkit to plan a service-learning project for the children they serve. Another 16 volunteers will mentor low-income families with children under the supervision of the Department of Corrections, through the Southern Windsor County Mentoring Collaborative. *Contact: Wendy Regier (802) 885-2083 or rsvp@hcrs.org*

If you need further help finding a specific Senior Corps program in your area, please contact Barbara Wilson with Senior Corps by e-mail at bwilson@cns.gov or telephone number 202 606-5000 extension 297.